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Kimmel, E. L.





BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE IDEA OF GOD IN ROBERT FROST'S POETRY

by

Elmer LeRoy Kimmell

(A.B., Dickinson College, 1936)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Professor of Historical Theology



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FALL 1900

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## OUTLINE

Introduction	page
A. Understanding the man	1
B. His Poetry	4
C. Background	5
D. Idea of God	6
I. A Boy's Will - 1913	
A. Nature	8
B. Nature and man	11
C. Cooperation between men	13
D. Problem of evil	15
E. Attitude of confidence	16
II. North of Boston - 1914	
A. Desire for reality	17
B. Human tragedies	18
C. Faith over tragedies	22
III. Mountain Interval - 1916	
A. Cross-roads	25
B. Interrelation of beliefs	27
C. Man and nature	31
IV. New Hampshire - 1923	
A. Realist	34
B. Mystery and realism	35
C. Practical religion	37
D. Conception of God	38
E. Inner grip	41
V. West-Running Brook - 1928	
A. Touch of grief	43
B. Need of beauty	45
C. Optimism	46
D. Immortality	48



# OUTLINE

page	Introduction
1	A. Understanding the man
4	B. His Poetry
5	C. Background
6	D. Idea of God
	I. A Boy's Will - 1917
8	A. Nature
11	B. Nature and man
13	C. Cooperation between man
15	D. Problem of evil
16	E. Attitude of confidence
	II. North of Boston - 1914
17	A. Desire for reality
18	B. Human tragedies
22	C. Faith over tragedies
	III. Mountain Interval - 1916
25	A. Cross-roads
27	B. Interpretation of beliefs
31	C. Man and nature
	IV. New Hampshire - 1923
34	A. Realist
35	B. Mystery and realism
37	C. Practical religion
38	D. Conception of God
41	E. Inner ship
	V. West-Running Brook - 1928
45	A. Touch of evil
46	B. Need of beauty
48	C. Optimism
48	D. Immortality



VI. A Further Range - 1936	page
A. Work-belief	50
B. Dialetic of beliefs	52
C. Spirit of the unknown	53
Digest	55
Bibliography	58

page

VI. A Further Range - 1938

50

A. Work-belief

52

B. Beliefs of belief

53

C. Beliefs of the unknown

55

Digest

58

Bibliography

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## INTRODUCTION

The idea of God in Robert Frost's poetry changes often in the books that he has published. Consequently, it will be the purpose of this study to trace that idea according to the chronological publications. The conception never undergoes a drastic change, partly because of Frost's assurance that

They would not find me changed from him they knew,  
Only more sure of all I thought was true.<sup>1</sup>

## "AN ABIDING INHERITANCE"

However, the phrase "an abiding inheritance" in Frost's poetry is not of a nature that breeds drastic changes. This is not a philosopher or a theologian laboring under new ideas of God, but rather this is a New England farmer who sees "things as they are."

This does not mean that there is no depth in Frost's poetry, but rather that it is not a systematic depth. It is a well dug, not drilled. It is the glimpse that comes only to those "not in the position to look too deep." If Frost must be classified, it would not be as a systematic philosopher, but like Carson Ketchum as a "Newspaper Philosopher." Perhaps it is because there is in his "something that doesn't have a

<sup>1</sup>"Into My Own," Collected Poems of Robert Frost, 5.

"AN ABIDING INHERITANCE"



## INTRODUCTION

The idea of God in Robert Frost's poetry changes often in the books that he has published. Consequently, it will be the purpose of this thesis to trace that idea according to the chronological publications. The conception never under-goes a drastic change, partly because of Frost's assurance that

They would not find me changed from him they knew-  
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Moreover, the plainness and simplicity in his poetry is not of a nature that breeds drastic changes. This is not a philosopher or a theologian laboring under new ideas of God, but rather this a New Hampshire farmer who sees "things as they are."

This does not mean that there is no depth in Frost's poetry, but rather that it is not a systematic depth. It is a well dug, not drilled. It is the glimpse that comes only to those "not in the position to look too close." If Frost must be classified, it would not be as a systematic philosopher, but like Cameron Wilson as a "Wastepaper Philosopher." Perhaps it is because there is in him "something that doesn't love a

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<sup>1</sup>"Into My Own," Collected Poems of Robert Frost, 5.





wall." There is a rugged independence about him that causes him to leave Dartmouth after only a few months. He was only seventeen, but even then he had no desire to submit himself for four years to emerge afterwards a polished product. His relatives received him as they would a prodigal. They thought by giving him a real dose of life they could chase him back to school. But he worked in a factory taking care of the electric lights and read poetry in his spare time. From the very beginning he placed poetry first. As Sidney Cox has phrased it: "He 'lived in turning to fresh tasks,' making shoes, teaching with his mother, working in a mill, writing for a paper, in spite of the contempt of those of his relatives who could help him get an economic start, because he was bound not to let any job press him 'out of shape.' He was not concerned with getting ahead. He already knew, what he was to write after he had been recognized in poetry and in college teaching that the most exciting movement in nature is not progress, advance, but expansion and contraction, the opening and shutting of the eye, the hand, the heart, the mind."<sup>1</sup>

When we read Frost's poetry we are reading lines that grew out of life. They come from a man who enjoys life and accepts it; one who feels that "the best thing we're put here for's to see." So he writes what he sees. Yet as others have noted, there is insight as well as sight in what he writes. Below the

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney Cox, Robert Frost, 24-25.





tree there are roots and within the barn there is life. There is a doctrine that suggests that the very simplest things have the very deepest effects; trees, water, all natural objects and homely activities, common human beings and common human hopes are sources for the profoundest meditation. That is the way in which Frost deceives us. Just when we would think him a simple philosopher, he says something that makes us blink. He refuses to be tied down in any way. Sidney Cox has well phrased that trait in Robert Frost when he says:

Take him for a rural New Englander, and he will answer you as a man who played in a sort of boy gang in San Francisco. (He lived there until he was about ten years old.) Take him for a recluse who knows ferns and the rarer native orchids - as in fact he does - and he will surprise you as a reader of the sports page, or quote Will Rogers and commend him as the 'international court fool.' Assume that he is a poet of experience not much concerned with books, and he will tell you a story written in Egypt 5000 B.C., illuminate an idea by an observation on Maya art, or praise an original new critical presentation of Latin poets. If you have been led to think of him as part of a new movement in poetry, you will find him quoting Lucretius, or reading passages of astonishing wit and hard, exact images from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. If you know that he made a momentary laughingstock of young science teachers who have no trouble in thinking of the universe as a machine, and you infer from that that he is anti-scientific, you will hear perhaps first of all from him the latest private word of Bohr about the atom. Begin to sigh or smile at him for becoming genial and conservative now that certain of his friends are men of wealth and economic and political influence, and you will hear a menacing note in his voice and see stern lines around his mouth as he talks of unavenged injustices. Or you may hear him brand a novel of international reputation 'rotten,' as he tramps the floor denouncing in terms no one would print these attempts to find a way whereby spoiled souls can be cosseted in the bosom of society.<sup>1</sup>

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Cox, op. cit., 17-19.







This is the man whose poetry we are to study; and his poetry is as difficult to classify as the man. But there is no need to classify it even as there is no need to classify his God. Before any misunderstandings arise, it should be stated that the purpose of this paper is not to delve into Frost's idea of God. The purpose is, however, to uncover any ideas of God that may be found in his poetry. As can be readily seen there is a world of difference between the two purposes.

There is no specious sermonizing nor any overt moralizing in Frost's poetry. Things are seen and suggestive comments are made, but there is no more. There is no forcing the point through argument; like New Hampshire Frost has no ideas to sell. "To him nothing is so rounded, so satisfying as the fact; it is the consummation of his art."<sup>1</sup> "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows."<sup>2</sup> This would be refuted by at least one critic who feels that "undoubtedly his moral concern is sometimes urgent in wrong places," although, "undoubtedly it sometimes gives strength to his poetry."<sup>3</sup> To me it seems that Untermeyer is more nearly right. There is more of Browning than Tennyson in Frost. The fact is stated, never pleaded.

That reticence, after all, is characteristic of New England, the section which lives in most of his poems. Neighbors who shortly reply: "Good fences make good neighbors;" a

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Untermeyer, American Poetry Since 1900, 16.

<sup>2</sup>"Mowing", op. cit., 25.

John Freeman, Contemporary American Authors, by Squire, 184.  
article taken from London Mercury, 1925.





hired man who annoyed at the nervous energy and constant plaguing of his boss feverishly tries to suffocate him under a pile of hay, but who keeps his job because: "He knew I did just right;" a miller who showed the Red Man "the wheel pit all right;" a woman who could not forget her only child's death, nor the grave which her husband dug; and the husband who being cursed would "laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed;" men who "since they were not the one dead, turned to their affairs;" these people live in New England. They are not cold and unfeeling, nor does Frost make them seem unusually so. They face the facts without too much romance in a land that requires them to look closely, and yet they earnestly desire life "to go on living." When he first came east from San Francisco in 1885 with his mother he could not fathom these Yankee farmers. He said himself: "I could not get used to them. Then, when I was about 18 or 19, then came to me the pride of discernment and I found some good in them. I went on finding good in them and after that it was hard for me to find any bad in them."<sup>1</sup>

So when we go searching for the idea of God in poems written out of this environment we might well expect to find Him in the fields with the laborer who is putting the seed in the ground, or with the neighbors chatting over a stone

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<sup>1</sup> Ford, The Less Travelled Road, taken from an article in the Boston Globe, 1924.





wall. One's idea of God finds expression in what he does. A man seldom consistently lives what he believes, but that belief sometimes finds expression in his life. It would be as difficult consistently to repress that belief as consistently to express it. God in these poems will not be found in abstract thoughts and long philosophical meditations; rather He will be the "something sending up the sun;" and the bond which links man to man "whether they work together or apart." He will not be perfectly clear, sitting like the Hebrew God on a throne in heaven; for Frost and the average people about whom he writes feel no "smug certainty in regard to the inexplicable."<sup>1</sup> "Some things are never clear."<sup>2</sup>

The God who speaks through these lines is no new voice. It is a very old one and it has spoken many times before. He was the God of the first Pilgrim fathers who landed on these shores and who built their lives as strongly as the granite stone about them. He gave them fortitude in long, lonely moments and strength in adverse circumstances. He has always been their God and they have always been His people. Today, things, ideas and people have changed somewhat, but Frost continues to write about this vanishing race whom he knows so well and in whom he finds so much that is admirable. So occasionally in Frost's poetry there are glimpses of this ancient Judge who pronounces His sentence upon the just and the unjust. But when

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<sup>1</sup>H. F. Schomer, Robert Frost, 10.

<sup>2</sup>"Voice Ways," A Further Range, by Robert Frost, 57.



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<sup>1</sup> H. F. Schorer, *Robert Frost*, 10.  
<sup>2</sup> "Voice says," *A Further Reading*, by Robert Frost, 57.



he says that "God is that which a man is sure cares, and will save him, no matter how many times or how completely he has failed,"<sup>1</sup> he is expressing his own conviction which is for to-day the "Abiding Inheritance" of all lands.

By a sleep for that long all night,<sup>1</sup>

The passion for the "sleep" which first revealed in  
the youth has played with him all his life. Even he learned  
the reason for its strength

And thus it is I have no more  
Any one longer has sleep, the sleep that came.  
The love that is not me, and I can tell  
No, not surely, though I dwell  
For surely I know all the right time

with the figures who in some ways lived about it. There  
found pleasure and a great satisfying power in the variety  
of nature. It is in this world of nature that we find  
what that is like about the world.

In "A Prayer to Nature" there is described the power  
of nature, not for what it brings, nor for what  
it does, but because for nature's sake alone.

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers of the field  
And give us not to think so far away  
As the uncertain harvest, nor so far  
As simply in the springing of the seed

<sup>1</sup>Cox, op. cit., 40.





## I

## A BOY'S WILL - 1913

When I was young, we dwelt in a vale,<sup>1</sup>  
 By a misty fen that rang all night,

The passion for the "misty fen" which Frost developed in his youth has stayed with him all his life. Soon he learned the reason for its ringing:

And thus it is I know so well  
 Why the flower has odor, the bird has song.  
 You have only to ask me, and I can tell.  
 No, not vainly there did I dwell,<sup>2</sup>  
 Nor vainly listen all the night long.

Like the figures who in other years lived about Concord, Frost found pleasure and a great sustaining power in the revelations of nature. It is in this appeal of nature that we find so much that is both sight and insight.

In "A Prayer in Spring" there is breathed the pleasure of beauty, not for what reward it brings, nor for what it makes us seem, but beauty for beauty's sake alone.

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers to-day;  
 And give us not to think so far away  
 As the uncertain harvest; keep us here  
 All simply in the springing of the year.

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As the uncertain harvest; keep us here  
All simply in the springing of the year.

"In a Vale," *Ibid.*, 21.  
*Ibid.*



Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white,  
Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;  
And make us happy in the happy bees,  
The swarm dilating round the perfect trees.

And make us happy in the darting bird  
That suddenly above the bees is heard,  
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,  
And off a blossom in mid air stands still.<sup>1</sup>

It is this pleasure in realities that made him say in another poem: "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows;"<sup>2</sup> and then, still later to write: "The best thing that we're put here for's to see."<sup>3</sup> And the reason is:

For this is love and nothing else is love,  
The which it is reserved for God above  
To sanctify to what far ends He will     4  
But which it only needs that we fulfil.

There is no doubt or questioning here, only acceptance of what is to him a normal truth. These are the things that God has made and it is up to man to appreciate them as he will. It is this spirit that Freeman finds prevalent through all of Frost's poetry, as he writes: "Difficult as it would be for another to define Mr. Frost's faith, and difficult perhaps for himself to define it, there is heard from his first book to his latest a man's voice affirming and accepting, rather than an

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<sup>1</sup>"A Prayer in Spring," ibid., 17.

<sup>2</sup>"Mowing," ibid., 25.

<sup>3</sup>"The Star-Splitter," ibid., 218.

<sup>4</sup>"A Prayer in Spring," ibid., 17.

Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white,  
Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;  
And make us happy in the happy bees,  
The swart gliding round the garden trees.

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<sup>2</sup>"Working," *Ibid.*, 95.  
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intellectual eunuch's questioning and despairing."<sup>1</sup> There are exceptions to Mr. Freeman's statement, but in general it holds true that Frost's attitude in his poetry is mainly one of acceptance and of affirmation. Such is the appeal of "My November Guest" when grey days and bare are beautiful "as days can be;"<sup>2</sup> and so too of "To a Thawing Wind" when he would have the poet turned out of doors by a loud southwester. "Rose Pogonias," "Mowing," "The Vantage Point," and "A Line-Storm Song" contain no vehement protest against conditions, but all in some degree accept nature for what she is. "To a Thawing Wind" has about as much abandonment and feeling as Frost ever puts into his poems.

Still if the reader should stop with this embrace of nature, he would come away with only a small part of the poem. "Rose Pogonias", "The Vantage Point," and "A Tuft of Flowers" are rooted in much richer and deeper soil. I do not mean by this that Frost uses nature as a kind of spring board from which he can leap to all manner of moral depths. That, I think, is furthest from his intentions. Yet I do feel that it is the sense of affinity with the things which he sees that makes him so glad for the sight of "things as they are."

There is in "Rose Pogonias" a prayer that this "saturated meadow" might be forgotten and if not forgotten at the mowing

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<sup>1</sup>CAA, 18.

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, 18.  
<sup>2</sup> "My November Guest," *op. cit.*, 2.



time at least might be spared until some time when less "confused with flowers." Now one might carry the implication over into life and apply it as a plea for life to go on living, or at least life while in the youthful stage. Frost would not protest, but I feel that such application is much over-done and entirely unnecessary. Why need we wander so far from the subject? Is it not enough that here is a plea for beauty to be given a chance to live its full life? Can there not be a touch of God in this, or must all things religious bear the burden of a string of holy supplications? -- The idea of God in these poems will seldom, if ever, be labelled such. One would not expect Frost to write "Crossing the Bar" or "Flower in the Crannied Wall." Far more subtly through the glorification of the average in simple, unadorned terms Frost hands to another generation "the abiding inheritance."

One of the things that appears most often in Frost's poetry is a constant tendency to vacillate between nature and man. He will swing on a birch limb far off the ground, or plunge into the dark of a forest, but soon he swings down again and plants his feet on the earth or emerges from the woods to follow some "highway where the slow wheel pours the sand." When he gets enough of nature he comes back again to man; and when tired of man he retreats to nature. He has expressed this attitude very clearly in "The Vantage Point:"

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If tired of trees I seek again mankind,  
 Well I know where to hie me - in the dawn,  
 To a slope where the cattle keep the lawn.  
 There amid lolling juniper reclined,  
 Myself unseen, I see in white defined  
 Far off the homes of men, and farther still,  
 The graves of men on an opposing hill,  
 Living or dead, whichever are to mind.

And if by noon I have too much of these,  
 I have but to turn on my arm, and lo,  
 The sun-burned hillside sets my face aglow,  
 My breathing shakes the bluet like a breeze,  
 I smell the earth, I smell the bruised plant,  
 I look into the crater of the ant.<sup>1</sup>

"A Late Walk" more mildly has the same attitude:

When I go up through the mowing field,  
 The headless aftermath,  
 Smooth-laid like thatch with the heavy dew,  
 Half closes the garden path ....

I end not far from my going forth  
 By picking the faded blue  
 Of the last remining aster flower  
 To carry again to you.<sup>2</sup>

It is a first law of good photography that a picture must have life. Whether it be an animal or a person, the presence of animated beings helps to give the picture action. That law Frost observes in his poetry. Seldom does he write of nature without somewhere putting a person in the picture. It is another expression of this vacillation between nature and man.

This tendency to go back and forth between nature and man

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., 24.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 11.

It tipped of trees I seek again meaning,  
 Well I know where to hide me - in the dawn,  
 To a slope where the cattle keep the lawn.  
 There said I'll find a quiet place,  
 Myself unseen, I see in white defined  
 Far off the horses of men, and farther still,  
 The graves of men on an opposing hill,  
 Living or dead, whichever are to mind.

And all by noon I have too much of these,  
 I have but to turn on my side, and lo,  
 The sun-burned hillside sets my face aglow,  
 My breathing shakes the dust like a breeze,  
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 Op. cit., 24.  
 Ibid., 11.



is in itself an exemplification of the God-belief. The highly practical side of religion lies in a necessary cooperation between man and God. If a man believe mightily, it becomes his moral obligation to carry that belief with all its implications into his own life. The great example, of course, is that of Christ; when he had received God-sent inspiration on the mountain top, he did not waste his life there, but turned and went down carrying his vision with him so that he might minister to the people who were waiting at the foot of the mountain. There is not that sense of mission in Frost's poetry, but there is the movement from man to nature and back again which indicates his interest in them both. The interest in itself is not God-belief, but it is a necessary step toward it.

One of the strongest poems in A Boy's Will is the one called, "The Tuft of Flowers." Like "Rose Pogonias" it is about a tuft of flowers beside a brook that has escaped the mower's scythe. In this poem, however, he moves from the prayer that they might be saved to a spirit of cooperation between men which can and actually does save them. Man can appreciate beauty. In the poem he goes to turn the grass, but first listens to hear if the mower is still in the field:

I looked for him behind an isle of trees;  
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

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I looked for him behind an aisle of trees;  
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.



But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,  
And I must be, as he had been, - alone,

'As all must be,' I said within my heart,  
'Whether they work together or apart.'<sup>1</sup>

Then, when the butterfly on "tremulous wing" came back to him  
and finally guided him to the tuft of flowers untouched be-  
side the brook he could:

.... feel a spirit kindred to my own;  
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,  
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech  
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

'Men work together' I told him from the heart  
'Whether they work together or apart.'<sup>2</sup>

The poem ends in a wave of optimism as he feels himself akin  
to the distant mower; and that kinship between men is next to  
the kinship between God and man. In a coherent God-belief it  
must follow and will follow that: "Men work together, whether  
they work together or apart."

So closely related to the God-belief as to be almost a  
part of it, is the problem of evil. In some way the God-belief  
must answer the problem of evil. Robert Frost makes no pre-  
tense at having a solution to the problem. He merely faces  
it as he frankly faces all facts whether they be good or evil.  
There is no shying away, nor any covering over. In nature

<sup>1</sup>"The Tuft of Flowers," op. cit., 31.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 32.

But he had gone his way, the grass all brown,  
And I must be, as he had been, - alone,  
'As all must be,' I said within my heart,  
'Whether they work together or apart.'

Then, when the butterfly on "frenzied wing" came back to him  
and finally guided him to the cult of flowers untouched be-  
side the brook he could:

... I feel a spirit kindred to my own;  
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;  
But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,  
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;  
And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech  
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.  
'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,  
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there is birth and there is death; both are necessary.

Before the leaves can mount again  
To fill the trees with another shade,  
They must go down past things coming up,  
They must go down into the dark decayed.

They must be pierced by flowers and put  
Beneath the feet of dancing flowers.  
However it is in some other world  
I know that this is the way in ours.<sup>1</sup>

He is reluctant to discuss abstractly how it might be in "some other world"; for he is too interested in this world which is, he thinks, "the right place for love."<sup>2</sup> Never was there anyone so aesthetically interested in this world as the writer of these poems. The dying of beauty does not disturb him for he knows and is satisfied that "this is the way in ours." As Freeman observes, "Mr. Frost utters no lament for aesthetic loss, and seems content to endure what can't be cured."<sup>3</sup> Brenner also has here made a valuable comment: "It is this ability, this power to see things as they are that saves Frost from pessimism. It is that which makes him not so much a romantic or religious poet as a naturalistic one."<sup>4</sup>

There are times when he admits:

And my heart owns a doubt  
Whether 'tis in us to arise with day

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<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>"In Hardwood Groves," ibid., 37.

<sup>3</sup>"Birches," ibid., 152.

<sup>4</sup>Freeman, op. cit., 38.

<sup>4</sup>Rica Brenner, Ten American Poets, 23.





And save ourselves unaided.<sup>1</sup>

But there is no honorable way left open to man but to use all his powers and fight:

Ah, when to the heart of man  
Was it ever less than a treason  
To go with the drift of things,  
To yield with a grace to reason,  
And bow and accept the end  
Of a love or a season?<sup>2</sup>

No, even the bravest shall find "that the utmost reward of daring should be still to dare."<sup>3</sup> He was "ever a fighter, so one fight more the best and the last." When the battle has been fought and the summit attained he knows that "always God speaks at the end."<sup>4</sup>

In this first volume of poems there is a note of certainty. Life has not awakened him to, or at least not depressed him with, too many problems. The tragedies of "Out, Out-," "A Servant to Servants," "Home-Burial," and "The Self-Seeker" are yet to come. Now he would tell all who seek him:

They would not find me changed from him they knew -  
Only more sure of all I thought was true.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Storm Fear," op. cit., 13.

<sup>2</sup>"Reluctance," ibid., 43.

<sup>3</sup>"Trial by Existence," ibid., 28.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>"Into My Own," ibid., 5.





## II

## NORTH OF BOSTON - 1914

When North of Boston was printed in England it found ready acclaim and was not long in finding publication in America. This volume of poems assured Frost of his long desired position as a poet. The volume is interspersed with light poems like "Good Hours," and "The Mountain," and even touches of humor as in "A Hundred Collars," but mostly these are serious poems that deal with human suffering and striving as in "Home-Burial," "Black Cottage," "A Servant to Servants," "The Fear," "The Self-Seeker," and "The Wood-Pile." But I never find them so utterly depressing and discouraging as some critics do. Weirick comments: "There is indeed, beauty in life and in nature, but under the beauty is death, and around life and its urges, futility."<sup>1</sup> Wood is disposed to say: "The effect of the stories is that they are largely pointless: which merely points to the fact that he is the unleafed laureate of a people living and dying pointlessly."<sup>2</sup> There are always those who would have every story end on a "happily ever after" note, but Frost would have them end as they would end. He has no desire to repolish and remake them. He is willing to "let

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce Weirick, From Whitman to Sandburg In American Poetry, 184.

<sup>2</sup>Clement Wood, Poets of America, 156.





what will be, be."<sup>1</sup>

It cannot be said too often or too emphatically in this paper that Frost is not a religionist, at least not the conventional religionist. He is a religionist in the same way that every man is a religionist, a searcher after love, truth, life, God. But Frost is not even a frantic searcher. His life is not spent in looking for the unfindable, nor in pursuing the Holy Grail. He is wholly content, it seems, in taking life as it comes, finding it sometimes good and sometimes not so good. He is not even a searcher after subject material for his poetry. He takes experiences as they come and if they stir him and he has a pen or pencil near at hand he makes notes on it, and if not, he merely stores it away and turns his mind from it. As Farrar writes: "He fights no glorious combats with existence. He is not a propagandist for God or Puritanism - no, not even for the back-to-the-farm movement."<sup>2</sup>

Still Frost does not refrain from occasionally picking a text, although he spares us the length of a sermon.<sup>3</sup> The text of "Mending Wall" might be that "something there is that doesn't love a wall." There might well be two texts to "Mending Wall" for it is also paradoxically true that "good fences make good neighbors." In "Death of the Hired Man," the

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<sup>1</sup>"Acceptance," op. cit., 313.

<sup>2</sup>John Farrar, article in The Recognition of Robert Frost, edited by Richard Thornton, 166.

<sup>3</sup>Freeman, CAA, 26-27.





text is that of a wasted life. A man too proud to go to his more well-to-do brother comes home again to a friendly farm where he has worked every year, and this time he comes to stay. The text is not a repeated refrain, in fact, it might be missed entirely. The reader sympathizes with the poor, old fellow whose working days are over, who was "so concerned with other folk," and who now has:

Nothing to look backward to with pride,  
And nothing to look forward to with hope,<sup>1</sup>

As we sit with Mary on the steps watching to see "if that small sailing cloud will hit or miss the moon" we are not over-depressed when Warren returns with on word on his lips, "dead." Somehow we feel that it was not written for a morbid effect, but simply because life is like that. Frost accepts life for what it is and is satisfied with what he finds in it.

There is a real tragedy in "Home-Burial." The woman who has lost her first child cannot bear the sight of his grave which she can see from her upstairs window, and at such times, neither can she tolerate the presence of her husband whom she thinks unfeeling and unsympathetic because he dug his own child's grave. One sympathizes with the woman as he sees insanity creeping upon her, but his real sympathy is with the husband who wants to share his wife's troubles but who cannot

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<sup>1</sup>"Death Comes To The Hired Man," op. cit., 49.

text is that of a wasted life. A man too proud to go to his more well-to-do brother comes home again to a friendly farm where he has worked every year, and this time he comes to stay. The text is not a repeated refrain, in fact, it might be mis- ed entirely. The reader sympathizes with the poor, old fellow whose working days are over, who was "so concerned with other folk," and who now has:

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<sup>1</sup>"Death Comes To The Married Man," op. cit., 49.



penetrate her shroud of grief. He even suggests that:

We could have some arrangement  
By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off  
Anything special you're a-mind to name.  
Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.  
Two that don't love can't live together without them.  
But two that do can't live together with them.<sup>1</sup>

It is the same text as in "Mending Wall" that "something there is that doesn't love a wall." There must be no barriers in real love, but each must share the other's burdens.

But so with all, from babes that play  
At hide-and-seek to God afar,  
So all who hide too well away  
Must speak and tell us where they are.<sup>2</sup>

"A Servant to Servants" is another excellent psychological study. As one reads the poem he can feel the waves of insanity moving on the speaker who is aware of it herself. There are some things, she says, that window-views will not help. Some wounds there are that cannot be treated from the outside in. Yet there is no despairing or pulling of hair, but only a quiet acceptance of fate:

I 'spose I've got to go the road I'm going:  
Other folks have to, and why shouldn't I?

Perhaps there is too much acceptance, too much strength or too

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<sup>1</sup>"Home-Burial," ibid., 69.

<sup>2</sup>"Revelation," ibid., 27.





much weakness in the "Servant's " attitude. It is hard to tell which. But it is a relief not to hear pleas for divine intervention in the last moments of despair. As Untermeyer puts it: "Another thing that gives these poems so potent an illusion of reality is the absence of the guiding hand of the creator; the figures live and breathe and move of their own desire and necessity."<sup>1</sup> What Untermeyer says here is true, but it by no means makes this study null and void, nor does it even mean that the writer of the poems is without a serious thought about creator. Frost in this particular volume of poems has hit upon a fundamental law of life which he comes back to often. "Every man's fate is himself. All that a lion eats becomes lion. All that serpent eats becomes serpent. Through the whole of life runs the mysterious law of assimilation, by which not so much the outward nature of the thing devoured, but the inward nature of the one who eats it determines the consequence."<sup>2</sup> The ruination of most people is not fate, nor a predestined plan, but themselves. That proved true in the case of the farmer in "The Code" and of the woman in "Home-Burial" and so too of the woman in "The Fear" whose disloyalty to her husband was her constant plague. The greatest source of trouble to people is themselves. If such be the doctrine behind these poems, no

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<sup>1</sup>Untermeyer, APS-1900, 21.

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<sup>1</sup> Untermyer, *Asa 1900*, 21.  
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wonder then that there is no guiding hand of the creator to intervene ex machina.

"The Fear" carries the same theme that sin has its own rewards. The woman in the poem has left her husband and now is living with another man. But she is always afraid that some day she will meet her husband. Some have interpreted the poem as though she did meet her husband on arriving home one night from town, but it appears to me that the prowler she met was really a stranger and the tension of her own fear made her collapse. However that may be, the text remains the same: that sin has its own system of rewards and punishments.

There is one thing in Frost's poetry which no one can miss, and that is life. Life is there; moving, pulsating life, in joy and in pain runs through the poems like a steady, flowing stream. Some have felt that: "The only substance and meaning of Robert Frost's poetry is human life - moving on, struggling, defeated, and moving on again - and aware only of its own reality and humanness."<sup>1</sup> Largely, that seems to be true, but occasionally there are glimpses of a something more than human life simply struggling on only conscious of its own reality. There is more than just the desire of moving on that makes him want life, in spite of all its pain "to go on living." That greater something is soul; soul living on and increasing

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<sup>1</sup> David Lambuth, article in The Recognition of Robert Frost, edited by Richard Thornton, 142.

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<sup>1</sup> David Lambuth, article in The Recognition of Robert Frost,  
edited by Richard B. Sewall, 1942.



its worth. This is behind the poems rather than shouting all the way through them. In the "Self-Seeker" there is sad resignation in the fact that: "Everything goes the same without me there."<sup>1</sup> But there is nothing pessimistic in the sound of the voice as he says it, and then, he follows with real strength in saying that: "What we live by we die by."<sup>2</sup> Then, we ponder over the title of the poem and wonder after all who is the "Self-Seeker", the lawyer or the injured man. The lawyer is seeking to close a good piece of business for his company. That is his work. But the injured man seems also to be a seeker. He does not want to be bothered with all this prattle about settlements. He is anxious to get it over with as soon as possible. When the lawyer and the injured man's friend begin to argue over the amount of settlement, the "Broken One" says:

This is between you two apparently.  
Where I come in is what I want to know.  
You stand up to it like a pair of cocks.      3  
Go outdoors if you want to fight. Spare me.

Rather than spend his life in courts fighting for another five hundred dollars, he would prefer to give up the claim and spend what time he could with his flowers even though he must enjoy them vicariously through little Anne's picking.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

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In North of Boston as much as in any of his books Frost has vividly portrayed life as it is without the dirt of reality and certainly without the tears of sentimentality. As Phelps says: "He is not only sincere, he is truthful - by which I mean that he not only wishes to tell the truth but succeeds in doing so."<sup>1</sup> In his first volume, A Boy's Will, there was a sense of certainty. That sense has not diminished in this volume, but it has been put to a severer task. The multiple evils of insanity, moral degeneration, social ills, and tragedy are enough to shake the faith of the staunchest believer, but through it all Frost stands serene; still sure that:

They would not find me changed from him they knew -  
Only more sure of all I thought was true.<sup>2</sup>

I would second the remarks of Schomer who writes:

Amid the debris of shattered beliefs he has firmly fixed his feet, and raising a clear and eager voice above the wails and moans of his contemporaries, he has founded upon in the ultimate validity of his own sensitive emotional reaction to the world a way of life that is virile and profound and satisfying.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Lyon Phelps, The Advance of English Poetry in 20Th Century, 244.

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## III

## MOUNTAIN INTERVAL - 1916

One of the finest short poems that Frost has written opens this volume of poems. "The Road Not Taken" is most likely an auto-biographical poem, but just what decision it represents in Frost's life is difficult to say. Since it was probably written from the cottage at Ryton and Ledington it might well be as John W. Harris is disposed to feel that :

Here too, perhaps, he wrote 'The Road Not Taken,'  
which I like to believe, possibly quite wrongly,  
was a symbol of his choice to return to America  
rather than stay in England.<sup>1</sup>

When it is only supposing, one supposition is as good as another. I am inclined to feel that the poem refers to a far more important decision in his life; to the time when he decided to be a poet in spite of all difficulties and obstacles. It was this that made him leave Dartmouth after only a few months; this that made him bear the scorn of his relatives and persist in his pursuit of the elusive muse; and this, too, that would not allow him to change his style of writing even at the suggestion of an established poet and critic. He had chosen "the road less traveled by" and still is traveling it, "and

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that has made all the difference."<sup>1</sup>

The poem is a gem and might represent the cross-roads for many of us. That is the one thing about Frost's poetry, that you somehow, from the strength of the man behind it, rather than the character represented in the poem receive a feeling of assurance. This is a poem that deserves to be quoted:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

In Mountain Interval Mr. Frost has not expressed any new ideas of God, nor would we expect him to do so - and yet, if he did, we would be the least surprised. There is not so much of the tragedy of life poetry as in North of Boston with

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In Mountain Interval Mr. Frost has not expressed any new

idea of God, nor would we expect him to do so - and yet, if he did, we would be the least surprised. There is not so much of the tragedy of life poetry as in North of Boston with



exception of "The Vanishing Red," and "Out, Out--." The others follow the more gentle nature of "Birches," "Meeting and Passing," "A Time to Talk," and "The Encounter." Again it is the simple, the commonplace which inspires him to write and it is from these there comes implication of "God-belief." As has been said:

He has come to better terms than most of our poets with his environment, and has had a better environment to come to terms with, and has profited by both circumstances. That may explain why, as Munson says, he spends no time dilating on the aloofness or indifference of nature to the fate of man, and why, though, the tragedy of frustration is by no means absent from his writings, it is not set forth as the whole or even the norm of human life. Whatever may be Frost's limitations, he gives the impression of a wider and sounder and more many-sided development than that of any other living American Poet.<sup>1</sup>

Like the philosopher's dialectic of desire one belief grows out of another until behind them all comes the God-belief. "Religion, goodness, beauty, property, and crime grade into each other and decompose into each other, though religion is the highest in this graduation."<sup>2</sup> All beliefs are closely interwoven, so that it is hard to know where one stops and the other begins. Perhaps we are searching

For things that don't exist; I mean beginnings.  
Ends and beginnings -- there are no such things.  
There are only middles.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>T. K. Whipple, The Spokesmen, 109.

<sup>2</sup>Cox, op. cit., 40.

<sup>3</sup>"In the Home Stretch", CP, 139.

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<sup>1</sup> T. W. Higginson, *The Bookman*, 108.  
<sup>2</sup> Cox, op. cit., 10.  
<sup>3</sup> "In the House of the Lord," 113.



Robert Frost has spoken on belief; suppose he be allowed to speak for himself:

The person who gets close enough to poetry, he is going to know more about the word belief than anybody else knows, even in religion nowadays. There are two or three places where we know belief outside of religion. One of them is at the age of fifteen to twenty, in our self-belief. The young man knows more about himself than he is able to prove to anyone. He has no knowledge that anybody else will accept as knowledge. In his foreknowledge he has something that is going to believe itself into fulfillment, into acceptance.

There is another belief like that, the belief in some one else, a relationship of two that is going to believe into fulfillment. That is what we are talking about in our novels, the belief of love. And the disillusionment from disappointment in that belief. That can fail, of course .....

Now I think - I happen to think - that those three beliefs that I speak of, the self-belief, the love-belief, and the art-belief, are all closely related to the God-belief, that belief in God is a relationship<sup>1</sup> you enter into with Him to bring about the future.

He, too, then feels the interrelation of beliefs and of how God may be there, though not dragged in.

Then, perhaps, it is better if sometime "he didn't drag God into it,"<sup>2</sup> although we might understand that "he (doesn't) consider it a case for God."<sup>3</sup> There is no definite consistence about this poet save one thing. He never gets into an over-tension, over-joyed to sentimentality, or over-depressed to

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Frost, "Education by Poetry," in the Amherst Graduate Quarterly, vol. 20:2, February, 1931.

<sup>2</sup>"Snow," CP, 180.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 180.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Frost, "Education by Poetry," in the American Graduate  
Quarterly, vol. 28:2, February, 1931.  
<sup>2</sup>"Snow," CP, 180.  
<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 180.



weepiness; he simply never gets hysterical about anything. George F. Whicher finds this as one of the differences between Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson. "The extreme, almost hysterical, tenseness of some of Emily Dickinson's writing is not found in Frost. He is more relaxed and tolerant, a better-balanced poet, and one who expresses himself more characteristically in lives of other people."<sup>1</sup>

Frost's self-restraint is different, also from that of the ancient Greeks. It is less self-conscious and more a part of his natural character and apparently a part of the character in that section of the country of which he writes. It is restraint, not indifference, nor inhumanness that caused the people gathered around the bedside of the little boy who caught his hand in the buzz-saw to "turn to their affairs," since they "were not the one dead."<sup>2</sup> It is restraint and more, it is the will that life, some life must "go on living." That restraint is more easily understood than the emotion in "The Vanishing Red." The story of a miller's killing a Red Man who annoyed him with his guttural grunts about the mill is less real than any of the others. "The Code" has the same emotion in it, but partly because the characters are farmers and partly because the irritation from a fussy boss is more

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understandable, the poem takes on a sense of reality.

The alternative themes which were prevalent in the other volumes are also present here: the love of nature and the love of man; and these loves are linked in devious ways to a love of God. "Putting in the Seed" has all the love that makes him "slave to a springtime passion for the earth."<sup>1</sup> And all because "we love the things we love for what they are."<sup>2</sup> But the wild impulse to hide away in nature's loneliness leads to an incomplete end and one must turn back. Friends are needed to make life a rounded living and not a sharp point stuck into the future. That is why he is not adverse to put aside his plow when a friend comes up for a chat.

When a friend calls to me from the road  
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,  
I don't stand still and look around  
On all the hills I haven't hoed,  
And shout from where I am, "What is it?"  
No, not as there is a time to talk.  
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,  
Blade-end up and five feet tall,  
And plod: I go up to the stone wall  
For a friendly visit.<sup>3</sup>

There are times when one must pause for the spiritual, which comes, one way, through friends. After all, "one aged man - one man - can't fill a house."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Putting in the Seed," Cp, 155.

<sup>2</sup>"Hyla Brook," *ibid.*, 149.

<sup>3</sup>"Time to Talk," *ibid.*, 156.

<sup>4</sup>"An Old Man's Winter Night," *ibid.*, 135.

understandable, the poem takes on a sense of reality.

The alternative themes which were prevalent in the other volumes are also present here: the love of nature and the love of man; and these loves are linked in diverse ways to a love of God. "Putting in the Seed" has all the love that makes him "slave to a springtime passion for the earth."<sup>1</sup> And all because "we love the things we love for what they are."<sup>2</sup> But the wild impulse to ride away in nature's loneliness leads to an incomplete end and one must turn back. Friends are needed to make life a rounded living and not a sharp point stuck into the future. That is why he is not adverse to put aside his plow when a friend comes up for a chat.

When a friend calls to me from the road  
And slows his horse to a meaning wait,  
I don't stand still and look around  
On all the hills I haven't hoed,  
And shout from where I am, "What is it?"  
No, not as there is a time to talk.  
I turn my hoe in the mellow ground,  
Blaze-end up and live fast talk,  
And glad: I go to the stone wall  
For a friendly visit.

There are times when one must pause for the epiphany, which comes, one way, through friends. After all, "one aged man - one man - can't fill a house."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Putting in the Seed," CP, 155.  
<sup>2</sup>"Hyle Brook," *ibid.*, 149.  
<sup>3</sup>"Time to Talk," *ibid.*, 156.  
<sup>4</sup>"An Old Man's Winter Night," *ibid.*, 157.



One thing that is puzzling, puzzling to most of us, is "what to make of a diminishing thing."<sup>1</sup> A home in which there is no living; a heart in which emotions are burning low, a tree that is losing its leaves; - these are diminishing things which raise within us the questions of why and wherefore. Maybe that is just the way of things: - birth, growth, and death, ---

The truth being we are as much  
Too glad for the one thing  
As we are too sad for the other..<sup>2</sup>

Yet there is also truth in this that

Our very life depends on everything's<sup>3</sup>  
Recurring till we answer from within.

There is a paradox here, but life itself is made up of many paradoxes and Frost would be the last one to discolor and shape them so as to make them somehow fit.

When questions like these arise and perplex, and the answers are not to be found, he longs again to be a "swinger of birches:"

It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.

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<sup>2</sup>"The Oven Bird," ibid., 150.  
<sup>3</sup>"The Hill Wife's Loneliness," ibid., 160.  
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 paradoxes and these would be the last one to dissolve and  
 shape them so as to make them somehow fit.  
 When questions like these arise and perplex, and the  
 answers are not to be found, no longer again to be a "swinger of  
 circles."

It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
 And life is too much like a business word  
 Where your face burns and tickles with the goose  
 Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
 From a twig's having lashed across it open.

<sup>1</sup> "The Oven Bird," *ibid.*, 150.  
<sup>2</sup> "The Hill Wife's Loneliness," *ibid.*, 150.  
 "Snow," *ibid.*, 150.



I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over.<sup>1</sup>

This is a feeling that we all have experienced; - a desire to begin all over again. That is the keynote in the idea of God. There is a wideness in God's mercy, wide as the sky is wide and deep as the ocean is deep. A God of mercy is also a God of love. Man's feverish ways so often lead him to stray that God's great mercy must be tremendously wide so that he sets him on his feet again and opens a strait way before him.

One night in 1916 Sidney Cox and Frost were talking. When the subject approached religion, Frost rejected Cox's convenient disposal of God as care for the things spiritual, and as summation of Most High Things. "God, he said, is that which a man is sure cares, and will save him, no matter how many times or how completely he has failed."<sup>2</sup> This is no attitude of mere escape as he would have us know:

May no fate wilfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.<sup>3</sup>

But there are times when,

I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
And climb, black branches up a snow-white trunk,

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<sup>1</sup>"Birches," *ibid.*, 152.

<sup>2</sup>*Op. cit.*, 40.

<sup>3</sup>"Birches," CP, 152.







Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,  
 But dipped its top and set me down again.<sup>1</sup>  
 That would be good both going and coming back.

In life which demands so much sometimes, even considering  
 many more philosophical beliefs, "one could do worse than be  
 a "swinger of birches."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid.  
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1  
1914  
1915  
1916



## IV

## NEW HAMPSHIRE - 1923

He showed me that the lines of a good helve  
 Were native to the grain before the knife  
 Expressed them, and its curves were no false curves  
 Put on it form without.<sup>1</sup>

There is a native dislike here for falseness and cheapness. That in itself is an expression of a governing God-belief, if one needs to be reminded of the fact. A love of truth and straightforwardness is a love akin to the love of God; at least the houses are located on the same road. That is the reason why there is such a keen delight and eager embrace of reality in these poems, because of a desire for truth. As Frost has taught his classes, and as he has exemplified in his own writings, sincerity and individuality are the backbone of deep thinking. It is because of these ideals that Untermeyer would speak of Frost as a romantic person and a realistic poet.

It may, however, be well to point out that the purely romantic writer is dealing in a stuff that is the general property and known secret of a multitude. The realist on the other hand, must dare the commonplace; he must pick his own route among a thousand trodden paths, - a far harder task than adventuring into the fanciful where none can question him. Both travelers are after beauty; both are backboned by mystery. But the realist loves it as he loves life, for its difficulties and hardships; because of its rudeness and rigors, even more than in spite of them.

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<sup>1</sup>"Axe-Helve," CP, 228.

# IV

NEW HAMPSHIRE - 1925

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were native to the grain before the knife  
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Put on its form without.

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The realist on the other hand, must have the common-  
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familiar paths, - a far harder task than adventuring  
into the fanciful where none can question him. Both  
creations are after beauty; both are beckoned by  
mystery. But the realist loves it as he loves life,  
for its difficulties and hardships; because of its  
roughness and rigors, even more than in spite of them.



The romantist is in love with ideas about life -  
 ideas that everyone loves;<sup>1</sup> a more obvious beauty,  
 a less mysterious mystery.

That "mysterious mystery" has its fascination for the poet,  
 although he claims to be superstitious; "by which he means that  
 he accepts no explanation of mystery."<sup>2</sup> Of course, there are  
 times when in "Misgiving" he feels:

I only hope that when I am free  
 As they are free to go in quest  
 Of the knowledge beyond the bounds of life  
 It may not seem better to me to rest.<sup>3</sup>

Surely, rest is to be preferred to endless talk:

And, 'Better defeat almost,  
 If seen clear,  
 Than life's victories of doubt  
 That endless talk<sup>4</sup> talk  
 To make them out.

Sometimes, he wonders about all these looks at the stars -  
 wonders where it is getting us anyway.

We're looked and looked, and after all where are we?  
 Do we know any better where we are,  
 And how it stands between night tonight  
 And a man with a smoky lantern chimney?<sup>5</sup>  
 How different from the way it ever stood?

<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., 17.

<sup>3</sup>Cox, op. cit., 40.

<sup>4</sup>CP, 292.

<sup>5</sup>"An Empty," *ibid.*, 256.

"The Star-Splitter," *ibid.*, 218.





Finally, although he professes no answer to the mysteries, nor even desires one, he concludes:

.... for what I search<sup>1</sup>  
I must go measuring stone walls, perch on perch<sup>1</sup>

Similar to Tennyson's attitude toward the flower in the crannied wall, is Frost's feeling that the bit of fallen star which he might find would hold promise of whole worlds:

Such as it is, it promises the prize  
Of the one world complete in any size<sup>2</sup>  
That I am like to confess, fool or wise.

He believes in the "philosophy of the part for the whole .... Nature (however) does not complete things. She is chaotic. Man must finish and he does so by making a garden and building a wall."<sup>3</sup> Man does not always finish so well, but Frost does not despair at his sometimes futile gestures; he bears with him confident that "we will not be put off the final goal."<sup>4</sup> For as there is a "wideness in God's mercy," so there must be also a wideness in the mercy of man for man. As Frost writes in "The Star-Splitter":

If one by one we counted people out  
For the least sin, it wouldn't take us long  
To get so we had no one left to live with,  
For to be social is to be forgiving.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"A Star in a Stone-Boat," ibid., 213.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Gorham Munson, Robert Frost, 83.

<sup>4</sup>"On a Tree Fallen Across the Road," CP, 296.

<sup>5</sup>"The Star-Splitter," ibid., 218.

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which he might find would hold promise of whole worlds:

Such as it is, it promises the prize  
Of the one world complete in any size  
That I am like to chance, fool or wise.

He believes in the "philosophy of the part for the whole ...  
Nature (however) does not cooperate things. She is chaotic.  
Man must finish and he does so by making a garden and building  
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in "The Star-Splitter":

It can be one we counted people out  
For the least sin, it wouldn't take us long  
To get so we had no one left to live with,  
But to be social is to be forgiving.

<sup>1</sup>"A Star in a Stone-Wall," *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Gorman Kunkin, *Robert Frost*, 57.

<sup>4</sup>"On a Tree Fallen Across the Road," *CP*, 296.

<sup>5</sup>"The Star-Splitter," *Ibid.*, 218.



There is no pent up pouting when an injustice is done:

Our thief, the one who does our stealing from us,  
We don't cut off from coming to church suppers,  
But what we miss we go to him and ask for.<sup>1</sup>

The medium of life is society and sociability implies forgiveness. Man is a queer animal with his many emotions; first love, then hate and then back again to love. It is hard to tell where he will be next. But whatever our faults "our singing strength" is such that "we have it hidden in us to attain."<sup>2</sup>

That, too, is religion; for Frost finds religion expressed not only in the good deed done as when we heal the sick or feed the poor and hungry; religion finds its expression, also, in our faults. "Religion to Frost is not exclusively the tool of mystics. It is a primary force in everyone's existence, taking its form according to the nature of a person's work. It includes not only one's faiths, but also one's faults."<sup>2</sup> There is considerable question, however, of just how it does take form. Surely, one's work is not the only determining factor; the set of the grain and the set of the sail play an important part in the form that religion will take. Some things

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> "On a Tree Fallen in the Road," CP, 296.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Ford, The Less Traveled Road, 22.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>2</sup> "On a Tree Fallen in the Road," CP, 296.  
<sup>3</sup> Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, The Leaf That Fell, 22.



are imposed from the outside in, but never completely:

Our very life depends on everything's<sup>1</sup>  
Recurring till we answer from within.<sup>1</sup>

It is then that we have a firm grip from which there is never any need to let go.

One of the things that the reader feels on reading these poems is the strength and inner security of the writer. Sidney Cox who knows him intimately has commended this quality in Frost. He said: "Firmness in refusal to comply with external forces except when his internal force is in accord is the trait that I am most frequently astonished by in him. Nobody else I ever knew has given me such a sense of having freedom, a margin of actual self-determination."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the sense of freedom comes as the Lord said: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make ye free."<sup>3</sup> When the song of self-determination and personal achievement has been sung, the wise man has one more song to sing, that "something has to be left to God."<sup>4</sup>

God in these poems varies, as Caroline Ford has noticed, all the way from a father on whom one may depend as a last re-

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<sup>1</sup>"Snow," CP, 180.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., 22.

<sup>3</sup>St. John viii:32.

<sup>4</sup>"Goodbye and Keep Cold," CP, 281.

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Our very life depends on everything,<sup>1</sup>  
Rescuing all we answer from within.<sup>1</sup>

It is then that we have a firm grip from which there is never  
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God."<sup>4</sup>

God in these poems varies, as Caroline Ford has noticed,

all the way from a father on whom one may depend as a last re-

<sup>1</sup>"Snow," CP, 180.

<sup>2</sup>CP, cit., 52.

<sup>3</sup>St. John viii:32.

<sup>4</sup>"Godsbye and Keep Cold," CP, 231.



sort, to the most impersonal mechanisms. The latter idea grows mainly out of a poem like "I Will Sing You One-O" where the universe is but a huge mechanism in which wheel interlocks wheel in indifferent regularity. Hear how the notes sound:

Their solemn peals  
Were not their own:  
They spoke for the clock  
With whose vast wheels  
Theirs interlock.<sup>1</sup>

Just when one thinks he might pin down one such idea of God, he finds that the ground has shifted, or else the speaker; for the voice comes from the other side of the fence:

Somebody said to me a little while ago, 'It is easy enough for me to think of the universe as a machine, as a mechanism.'  
I said, 'You mean the universe is like a machine?'  
He said, 'No, I think it is one ... Well, it is like...'  
'I think you mean the universe is like a machine.'  
'All right. Let it go at that.'  
'I asked him, 'Did you ever see a machine without a pedal for the foot, or a lever for the hand, or a button for the finger?'"<sup>2</sup>

Frost was only illustrating the fallibility of a metaphor when he made the above statements, but even so, they might very well represent the versatility of the man's mind. He knows both stories, but he is not enough of an adherer or a propagandist to sell either side.

---

<sup>1</sup>"I Will Sing You One-O," *ibid.*, 264.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Frost, *EP*, vol. 20:2.

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<sup>1</sup>"I Will Sing You One-O," *ibid.*, 284.  
<sup>2</sup>Robert Frost, *EP*, vol. 20:2.



Whereas he would say: "I never had a good idea about improving people in the world,"<sup>1</sup> he nevertheless has had some excellent ideas about the "importance of being versed in country things." There is no responding chord in him to the Matthew Arnoldism that says, 'Nature is cruel, Man is sick of blood;' rather he would "hate to be a runaway from nature."<sup>2</sup> There is a strength in this love for nature which makes a gentle heart not enough:

The heart is not enough;  
I long for weight and strength  
To feel the earth so rough  
To all my length.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the same passion is felt in the poem "Fire and Ice" when in a few brief lines he gives a vivid impression of the power of emotions.

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.<sup>4</sup>

Ice most certainly would do as well, especially since there is so much more ice in New Hampshire, than there is fire.

---

<sup>1</sup>"New Hampshire," CP, 199.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"Fire and Ice," ibid., 268.

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The most certainly would do as well, especially since there is  
as much more ice in New Hampshire, than there is fire.

<sup>1</sup>"New Hampshire," CP, 199.  
<sup>2</sup>ibid.  
<sup>3</sup>ibid.  
<sup>4</sup>"Fire and Ice," ibid., 266.



When we move back again from human nature into nature itself, we find the old love still there and still strong. But now there is more control over the yearnings of youth which before would have taken him far from the road where "the slow wheel pours the sand." Sometime earlier he might have plunged into the woods without further ado, but now he has "promises to keep:"

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
 But I have promises to keep,  
 And miles to go before I sleep,<sup>1</sup>  
 And miles to go before I sleep.<sup>1</sup>

These lines give no direct idea of God, but as an attitude toward nature and toward life, they indirectly give promise of a God-belief; by the fact that there are certain values in life that must come first. When these values conflict with lesser ones there remains no choice: only "promises to keep." That is the theme of "Wild Grapes" also. When the little girl's brother grew tired of throwing his grapes from his perch in the tree, he threw down a branch for her so that she could pick her own and not molest him with her pleas for more. But when he let go she went flying through the air attached to the limb. She had not had the limb; the limb had had her. Years afterwards she remarked:

I had not taken the first step in knowledge;

---

<sup>1</sup>"Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening," ibid., 275.

When we move back again from human nature into nature itself, we find the old love still there and still strong. But now there is more control over the yearnings of youth which before would have taken him far from the road where "the slow wheel pours the sand." Sometimes earlier he might have plunged into the woods without further ado, but now he has "promises to keep."

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I had not taken the first step in knowledge;

1 "Escaping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening," *Idylls*, 275.



I had not learned to let go with the hands,  
 As still I have not learned to with the heart,  
 And have no wish to with the heart - nor need,  
 That I can see. The mind - is not the heart.  
 I may yet live, as I know others live,  
 To wish in vain to let go with the mind -  
 Of cares, at night, to sleep; but nothing tells me  
 That I need learn to let go with the heart.<sup>1</sup>

There are not many things that we would desire to "let go with the heart," however brief the glimpses of the heart may been. One ecstatic moment when the watcher is aware of his affinity with the spiritual bonds of the universe makes him feel like "some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken." It is only a glimpse that comes to him "who is not in position to look too close."<sup>2</sup>

Frost, at least once, was in such a position:

Once, when trying with chin against a well-curb,  
 I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture,  
 Through the picture, a something white, uncertain,  
 Something more of the depths - and then I lost it.  
 Water came to rebuke the too clear water.  
 One drop fell from a fern, and lo, a ripple  
 Shook whatever it was lay these at bottom,  
 Blurred it, blotted it out. What was that whiteness?<sup>3</sup>  
 Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something.

The question is: just how much closer can one get than "for once, then, something?"

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<sup>1</sup>"Wild Grapes," ibid., 240.

<sup>2</sup>"For Once, Then Something," ibid., 276.

<sup>3</sup>"A Passing Glimpse," ibid., 311.

I had not learned to let go with the hands,  
as still I have not learned to with the heart,  
and have no wish to with the heart - nor need,  
that I can see. The mind - is not the heart.  
I say not this, as I know others live,  
to wish in vain to let go with the mind -  
Of course, at night, to sleep; but nothing tells me  
that I need learn to let go with the heart.

There are not many things that we would desire to "let go  
with the heart," however brief the glimpses of the heart  
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him feel like "some watcher of the skies when a new planet  
swims into his ken." It is only a glimpse that comes to him  
"who is not in position to look too close."

First, at least once, was in such a position:

Once, when trying with this against a wall-cup,  
I discovered, as I thought, beyond the picture,  
through the picture, a something white, uncertain,  
something more of the nature - and then I lost it.  
Water came to replace the so clear water.  
One day fell from a fern, and so, a ripple  
showed whatever it was in these at bottom,  
blurred it, blurred it out. That was that whiteness?  
That? A piece of quartz? For once, then, something.

The question is: just how much closer can one get than "for  
once, then, something?"

1 "with grapes," *ibid.*, 240.  
2 "For once, then something," *ibid.*, 270.  
3 "A passing glimpse," *ibid.*, 271.



## V

## WEST-RUNNING BROOK - 1928

The poems in this volume represent no radical change from all that has gone before, but it does represent a change. No man lives stationary without even a change of tempo, or if he does, he lives alone, - I hope. The change here is of a man who more and more is relying on faith, rather than on a guess. It is the man who said:

They would not find me changed from him they knew -  
Only more sure of all I thought was true,

and we feel certain that he is more sure of all he thought was true. It is not the mellowness of age, if by mellowness, you mean weakness. The old vigor still is there. Perhaps it is because:

Something sinister in the house  
Told me my secret must be known:  
Word I was in the house alone  
Somehow must have gotten abroad,  
Word I was in my life alone,  
Word I had no one left but God.<sup>1</sup>

Personal grief, so close to home, opens up new worlds for some, and for others closes them.

It is this "acquaintance with the night" that has made

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<sup>1</sup>"Bereft," op. cit., 317.

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Told I was in the house alone  
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Told I was in my life alone,  
Told I had no one left but God.

Personal grief, so close to home, opens up new worlds for some, and for others closes them. It is this "acquaintance with the night" that has made

"Secret," or, alt., alt.



all the difference. There is no questioning, no doubt, but almost the prayer:

Now let the night be dark for all of me.  
Let the night be too dark for me to see,<sup>1</sup>  
Into the future. Let what will be, be.

It seems that there is the realization and almost the rebuke in some of the poems that he has been concerned too much with "inner weather." Still emotions are hard to control when they are lodged so dear and so deep, which makes this poem clear:

The rain to the wind said  
'You push and I'll pelt.'  
They so smote the garden bed  
That the flowers actually knelt,  
And lay lodged - though not dead.  
I know how the flowers felt.<sup>2</sup>

Mutual grief and sympathy were aroused in his breast when in walking about in a winter rain, he dislodged birds one night from the safety of their holes:

It grieved my soul,  
It started a grief within a grief,  
To think their case was beyond relief -  
They could not go flying about in search  
Of their nest again, nor find a perch.  
They must brood where they fell in mulch and mire,  
Trusting feathers and inward fire  
Till daylight made it safe for a flyer.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Acceptance," ibid., 313.

<sup>2</sup>"Lodged," ibid., 315.

<sup>3</sup>"The Thatch," ibid., 320.



1. The first thing I noticed when I stepped out of the plane was the cold air.

It was a relief, after the heat of the sun.

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Life, although he doesn't say so, might be like the experience of dropping parcels in the road, and every time we reach to pick up one, two or three more come tumbling down. Then, finally, we "sit down in the middle of them all," and "try to stack them in a better load."<sup>1</sup> In spite of the times that stops must be made, and bundles straightened in the middle of the road, life must "go on living." He is a fortunate one, if one of his bundles is a music box for then some music and color can be gotten out of life. This living from hand to mouth with never a chance for pleasure is a drab existence; so he does not criticise the couple who living in a hovel have spent money on a piano.

All that piano and new paint there,  
Was it some money suddenly come into?  
Or some extravagance young love had been to?  
Or old love on an impulse not to care -

Not to sink under being man and wife,  
But get some color and music out of life?<sup>2</sup>

Under such circumstances, it becomes rational "to spend all you have for loveliness."

Life is a stream, as in "West-running Brook:"

It flows between us, over us, and with us.  
And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love -  
And even substance lapsing unsubstantial;<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Armful," ibid., 343.

<sup>2</sup>"The Investment," ibid., 337.

<sup>3</sup>"West-running Brook," ibid., 327.

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 experience of dropping parcels in the road, and every time we  
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 novel have spent money on a piano.

All that piano and new paint there,  
 Was it some money suddenly come into?  
 Or some extravagance young love had been to?  
 Or old love on an impulse not to care -

Not to mind under being man and wife,  
 But get some color and music out of life?

Under such circumstances, it becomes rational "to spend all  
 you have for loveliness."

Life is a stream, as in "West-running Brook":

It flows between us, over us, and with us.  
 And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love -  
 And even substance lacking unobtainable;

1. "The Arrow," *ibid.*, 343.  
 2. "The Investment," *ibid.*, 357.  
 3. "West-running Brook," *ibid.*, 357.



and God is "something sending up the sun."<sup>1</sup> All life is a continual throw up to the ultimate source which is God. Thus, each belief and each experience is of great value in itself; for tracing back far enough there comes God behind them all. As Caroline Ford writes:

Although God sounds inaccessible, He is the ultimate source of the great events of our lives. I interpret this poem as an indication of Frost's optimism. He appears to me to infer that although the stream of oblivion keeps on running; people's lives have significance to the degree that they share the momentary power of the waves in heading back toward the source of the river - which for humanity is God.<sup>2</sup>

There is more optimism in "Sand Dunes" when Frost considers the livingness of mind. He is speaking of the sea when he writes:

She may know the cove and cape,  
But she does not know mankind  
If by any change of shape,  
She hopes to cut off mind.

In the last verse there is a ring akin to Holmes's poem, "The Chambered Nautilus:"

Men left her a ship to sink:  
They can leave her a hut as well;  
And be but more free to think<sup>3</sup>  
For the one more cast off shell.

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<sup>1</sup>"West-running Brook," ibid., 327.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., 24.

<sup>3</sup>"Sand Dunes," op. cit., 330.

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There is more optimism in "Sand Dunes" when Frost con-  
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 he writes:

She may know the cave and canyon,  
 but she does not know working  
 it by any change of shape,  
 she hopes to see old things.

In the last verse there is a ring akin to Holmes's poem, "The  
 Chambered Nautilus":

Men left her a ship to sink;  
 They can leave her a land as well;  
 And be but more free to think  
 for the one more cast off shell.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "West-running Brook," *Idylls*, 257.  
<sup>2</sup> *Idylls*, 24.  
<sup>3</sup> "Sand Dunes," *Idylls*, 250.



There is no hint of giving up the ship in these lines, nor in the lines:

The surest thing there is is we are riders,  
And though none too successful at it, guiders,  
Through everything presented, land and tide  
And now the very air, of what we ride.

What is this talked-of mystery of birth  
But being mounted bareback on the earth?  
We can just see the infant up astride,  
His small fist buried in the bushy hide.

There is our wildest mount - a headless horse.  
But though it runs unbridled off its course,  
And all our blandishments would seem defied,  
We have ideas yet that we haven't tried.<sup>1</sup>

This note of optimism verifies Schomer's opinion that: "He dares to affirm life not because salvation is guaranteed, but in spite of the fact that it is not."<sup>2</sup> The optimism arises from his faith in man, and behind that, from his faith in the ultimate good end of life.

This optimism is part of the abiding inheritance that he has to give to all who will receive. Some of it is felt in the staunch faith that beliefs out of fashion need not be abandoned:

For, dear me, why abandon a belief  
Merely because it ceases to be true.  
Cling to it long enough, and not a doubt  
It will turn true again, for so it goes.  
Most of the change we think we see in life  
Is due to truths being in and out of favour.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Riders," ibid., 345.

<sup>2</sup>Schomer, op. cit., 13.

<sup>3</sup>"The Black Cottage," op. cit., 74.

There is no hint of giving up the ship in these lines, nor in

the lines:

The earnest thing there is in our riders,  
And though none too successful at it, guides,  
Through everything presented, land and tide  
And now the very air, of what we ride.

What is this talked-of mystery of birth  
But being mounted back on the earth?  
We can just see the infant up astride,  
His small feet buried in the many hide.

There is our wilder's mount - a headless horse,  
But though it runs unbridled off its course,  
And all our hindrances would seem baffled,  
We have ideas yet that we haven't tried.

This note of optimism verifies Schomer's opinion that: "He

gives to affirm life not because salvation is guaranteed,

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This optimism is part of the abiding inheritance that we

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For, heed me, why abandon a belief  
Merely because it ceases to be true?  
Cling to it long enough, and not a doubt  
It will turn true again, for so it goes.  
Most of the change we think we see in life  
Is due to truths being in and out of favour.

<sup>1</sup> "Stanzas," *ibid.*, 242.  
<sup>2</sup> Schomer, *op. cit.*, 13.  
<sup>3</sup> "The Black Colours," *ibid.*, 24.



New beliefs do not send him hopping in search of shelter in deep woods, nor do they set him pondering for a new one himself. When the reader reads poems like "Black Cottage" and "The Rose Family" he reaps a sense of serenity and gladness from the reading. "The Rose Family has the same theme as the poem quoted above:

The rose is a rose  
And was always a rose.  
But the thing now goes  
That the apple's a rose  
And the pear is, and so's  
The plum, I suppose.  
The dear only knows  
What will next be a rose.  
You, of course, are a rose  
But were always a rose.<sup>1</sup>

"The reader is grateful to Mr. Frost not because he has learned something, but because he has experienced something. He has been fortified by the poet's serenity, strengthened by his strength. He has been intellectually revised and spiritually revived."<sup>2</sup>

Whereas, there is in these poems supreme faith in the ability of man to extricate himself from the most difficult and awkward situations, the faith comes not from the perfection of man and his work, but from his willingness to try. As a matter of fact:

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<sup>1</sup>"The Rose Family," *Idylls*, 305.  
<sup>2</sup>Untersmyer, article in *NR*, edited by Thornton, 194.



Our missiles always make too short an arc.  
 They fall, they rip the grass, they intersect  
 The curve of the earth, and striking, break their own;  
 They make us cringe for metal-point on stone.<sup>1</sup>

When such is the case there is comfort in their knowledge:

But this we know, the obstacle that checked  
 And tripped the body, shot the spirit on.<sup>2</sup>  
 Further than target ever showed or shone.

The spirit of immortality surges through these lines. Such  
 faith growing out of lesser faiths leads inevitably to faith  
 in God.

Not yield who will to their separation,  
 My object in living is to unite  
 My affection and my aspiration  
 As my two eyes make one in sight.  
 Only where love and need are one,  
 And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
 Is the deed ever really done  
 For Heaven and the Future's sake.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"A Soldier," op. cit., 332.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Our missiles always make too short an arc.  
They fall, they rip the grass, they intersect  
the curve of the earth, and striking, break their own;  
They make an orange for metal-point on stone.

When such is the case there is comfort in their knowledge:

But this we know, the obstacle that checked  
And tripped the foot, shot the spirit on  
Farther than danger ever showed or shone.

The spirit of immortality surges through these lines. Such  
Faith growing out of lesser faiths leads inevitably to faith

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## VI

## A FURTHER RANGE - 1936

This more recent volume of poems by Robert Frost swings the pendulum back into the realm of the social - if ever, it had departed from there. Most strikingly there appears the theme that a man's work is a vital part of him, even a necessary element in his God-belief. Caroline Ford considers it equally important: "Frost knows that man cannot live by love alone, even though it is reputed to make the world go around. Work is a necessary second love. It is man's art, and if he fails to believe in this he is likely to lose his faith in himself, in love, and in God."<sup>1</sup> Frost has stated his own attitude toward the union of these beliefs:

But yield who will to their separation,  
My object in living is to unite  
My avocation and my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight.  
Only where love and need see one,  
And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
Is the deed ever really done  
For Heaven and the future's sakes.<sup>2</sup>

Even the titles of many of the poems have the noisy sounds of work in them: "A Lone Striker," "A Roadside Stand," "Departmental," "Design," "Provide, Provide," and "A Trial

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Run," all sound as though the subject might be part of the work theme. In that respect, the titles are misleading; for although the work-belief seems strongly prevalent in this volume, it is far from being the whole of it. One of the most typical couplets of Frost's is this one called "Assertive:"

Let me be the one <sup>1</sup>  
To do what is done.

He repeats the above refrain in another poem with these words:

Thought product and food product are to me,<sup>2</sup>  
Nothing compared to the producing of them.

There is no greater joy than in a task well done; the player upon the diamond, the runner upon the sod, the shot-maker on the court are enjoying experiences that far surpass the vicarious experience of the gallery. It is only in the center of things, in the midst of life's traffic with eye watchful, mind alert, and hand ready that the surpassing experience of doing is realized. Nothing is so stupefying as the task of continually being the silent watcher.

Even as one reads this following section of the poem that could easily have been an escape from work he is made conscious

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He repeats the above refrain in another poem with these words:

Thoughtful product and good product are to me  
Nothing compared to the product of them.

There is no greater joy than in a task well done; the player upon the diamond, the runner upon the sod, the shot-maker on the court are enjoying experiences that far surpass the vicar-ious experience of the gallery. It is only in the center of things, in the midst of life's traffic with eye watchful, mind alert, and hand ready that the surpassing experience of doing is realized. Nothing is so satisfying as the task of contin-ually doing the effort required.

Even as one reads this following section of the poem that could easily have been an escape from work he is made conscious

1 "Ten Miles," ibid., 69.  
2 "Build Built," ibid., 65.



of the multiplicity of active verbs. The worker shut out of the mill by the time-keeping gate finds it easy to resist the work, because so much else calls him:

He knew another place, a wood,  
And in it, tall as trees, were cliffs;  
And if he stood on one of these,  
'Twould be among the tops of trees,  
Their upper branches round him wreathing,  
Their breathing mingled with his breathing.  
If - if he stood! Enough of ifs!  
He knew a path that wanted walking;  
He knew a spring that wanted further drinking;  
A thought that wanted further thinking;  
A love that wanted re-renewing.  
Nor was this just a way of talking  
To save him the expense of doing.  
With him it boded action, deed.<sup>1</sup>

When the work-belief is stressed, it means that behind it lies a great confidence in the abilities of man. The conception of a man carving out his own destiny is not an unusual one for New England where the power of circumstances have forced men to rely upon their own initiative and brawn. That conception is present in the poem, "On the Heart's Beginning to Cloud the Mind:"

But my heart was beginning to cloud my mind.  
I knew a tale of a better kind.  
That far light flickers because of trees.  
The people can burn it as long as they please:  
And when their interests in it end,  
They can leave it to someone else to tend.  
Come back that way a summer hence,

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And if he stood on one of these,  
'Twould be among the tops of trees,  
Their upper branches round him wrestling,  
Their breathing mingled with his breathing.  
It - it was good! enough of life!  
He knew a cave that wanted walking;  
He knew a spring that wanted further drinking;  
A thought that wanted further thinking;  
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And when their interests in it end,  
They can leave it to someone else to tend.  
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<sup>1</sup>"A Lone Striker," *Ibid.*, 15.



I should find it no more no less intense.  
 I pass, but scarcely pass no doubt,  
 When one will say 'Let us put it out.'  
 The other without demur agrees.  
 They can keep it burning as long as they please<sup>1</sup>

Men can do many things and "it's knowing what to do with things that counts." When Frost was a teacher that was the theory behind his teaching. He asked his pupils to name all the uses that poetry might serve; he asked them things he could not lay his finger on himself, for of such is progress. It is knowing what to do with beliefs that count. That is why, for Frost, the overlapping of beliefs, the self-belief, the love-belief, and the art-belief so practically lead to the God-belief.

Man possesses the "master speed." Memory carries him streaking through centuries flowing between the banks of history, and, best of all, he controls it. He has "the power of standing still" while all the waste of an age comes crumbling down. Mind such as this was built for eternity. But before eternity, it might be well to take this bit of practical advice - attention America:

Steal away and stay away.  
 Don't join too many gangs. Join few if any.  
 Join the United States and join the family -  
 But not much in between unless a college.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"On the Heart's Beginning to Cloud the Mind," ibid., 38.  
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"Some things are never clear," but that is certainly clear enough. The way that we have given ourselves to so many things, a fourth vice-president here and a treasurer there, it is a wonder that we have anything left for ourselves, let alone for God. Then, there is despair when:

I turned to speak to God  
About the world's despair;  
But to make matters worse  
I found God wasn't there.

while the real reason is hidden in the fact that:

God turned to speak to me  
(Don't anybody laugh)  
God found I wasn't there -  
At least not over half.<sup>1</sup>

God deserves cooperation. The vision is not clear; men "cannot look out far", nor "in deep:"

But when was that ever a bar  
To any watch they keep?<sup>2</sup>

This is the note which Frost, himself, concludes on:

There may be little or much beyond the grave,<sup>3</sup>  
But the strong are saying nothing until they see.

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While the real reason is hidden in the fact that:

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## DIGEST

Robert Frost in these volumes of poetry has expressed for all men a basis for God-belief that is at once factual and satisfying. The satisfaction mainly comes from a willingness to face the facts. Frost makes no attempt to apologize for evil. In spite of adverse circumstances he knows that God is that which sends "up the sun." It is the strength of this conviction which is felt rather than seen, that makes Frost's poetry so completely satisfying to the reader.

The ideas about God in these poems grow most often out of action, rather than out of abstract thought. Problems of human relationship, of moral degeneracy, of mortal cooperation, and of suffering and sin make up most of the foreground when ideas of God are introduced. Yet they are hardly ever introduced; they seem to rise naturally from the subject. That is because God's natural place is with men and not away from them. If immortality be true, and a man's soul is worth more a century's flight across the earth, then God should be with men helping them direct their own destinies. Frost has great faith in man, but he never finds him wholly sufficient; for "some things must be left to God." On the other hand, Frost has strong faith in God, but as the poem in "Ten Mills" indicates God cannot work alone. Cooperation between God and man, man and man, and man and nature is necessary for a harmonious world.

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If any one text should be digested it is, that God is to be found in the commonplaces of life. Out of nature, through beauty, in human relationships, and in spite of suffering God comes assuring man that "all's well," and that there is still "that which cares" in the universe. Surely, "God speaks in the end." The main thesis of this paper has been that very thing: behind all things, beliefs, doubts, and even faults there is the All Pervading Power. Consequently, one belief leads to another until God comes up behind.

A Boy's Will sets the pace for the books which are to follow. It is dominated by an attitude of confidence, confidence in man and nature, and confidence that the attitude is right. North of Boston with some of the best dramatic monologue poems that Frost has written describes the life North of Boston which could just as well have been, as far as some things are concerned, north of Timbuktu, so universal are the situations described. West-Running Brook's flowing theme is mainly one of mutual sympathy with all that lives and breathes. It appears to be a sympathy which grew out of a personal grief. Now, the book of poems published in 1936, while not over-run with Sandburg's social consciousness, nevertheless, contains many poems which indicate that the author is not unaware of the realistic world he lives in. A Further Range sings of the work-belief.

No one volume, however, is dedicated to any one thesis.

50

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No one volume, however, is dedicated to any one theme.



Frost writes as he experiences whether that experience be through his hands, eyes, mind, or heart. This is the "Original Ordinary Man" who follows his own desires and finds that they lead inevitably to God.

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52

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